

Anti-Inflation Act

he is going to stay in the cabinet it would be very much in the national interest to keep him as far away as possible for as long as anyone will take him.

Miss MacDonald: Pity the people of Africa.

Mr. Clark: Those are the privileges of office. Sometimes they are properly used but often so abused by this government. But, sir, there is more to office than privilege. There is also responsibility—responsibility to lead; responsibility to do what is right, even if the kind of public opinion polls cited by the minister the other day indicate that what is right might be temporarily unpopular. Nowhere is that kind of leadership more needed now and more absent than on the question of controls and the future direction of the economy of Canada.

This government has already been irresponsible enough on controls. When my predecessor, the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield), had the courage to propose what was necessary in 1974, the government, and particularly the Prime Minister, responded with the kind of irresponsibility that has lost him forever any trust that he might have enjoyed among members of this House. Many of the people of Canada will not soon forget the Prime Minister pointing his finger and saying, “Zap—you are frozen”, condemning the program which a year later he implemented.

That proposal, that discrepancy, that inconsistency, that spending, that foolish wasting of public trust by the Prime Minister, is not at all a joke for Canadians. It is a very serious betrayal of trust. It is one of the reasons Canadians, whether members of organized labour, those who are not members of unions, whether in business or private citizens, do not trust this government now and will not trust this government until we have at least an indication of when and how it intends to end controls and begin to restore growth to the economy.

The major problem in Canada now is a problem of confidence. Instead of confidence we have a con game going: we have hints about when controls might end. We have a number of options that might be considered by the government. But we have seen nothing that the people of Canada can count on when they make the plans they need to make. No leadership has been shown in regard to the future of Canada and the context in which individual decisions must be made.

I do not want to debate what the anti-inflation program has accomplished for Canada. I am quite prepared to be generous and admit that in the early months it may well have helped to reduce inflationary expectations. But that benefit has long since passed. Today we have a program that is full of injustices. The hon. member who spoke before me cited some of these. We have a program that has become a model of bureaucratic empire-building, a program that is seriously undermining investor confidence and planning in this country. That is the program which this government intends to keep in place indefinitely so far as we know—and we have to ask why. The most charitable explanation is that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald) and his advisers are paralysed. They know they have not dealt with any of the fundamental problems of this country and they do not begin to know how

[Mr. Clark.]

they will deal with them. So they have let controls linger on as a kind of security blanket, in order to hide their own indecision. Sir, we sometimes call the Minister of Finance “Big Mac”. A better name would probably be “Linus”.

● (1620)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The only other explanation for this government's refusal to end the AIB program is that the government does not want to end controls. This is, after all, the government which loves to meddle in the affairs and individual lives of Canadians, which believes it knows better than anybody else does, and that only it can decide what is in the best interest of all of us. The hon. member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), who is in this House, participated in the debate the other night and spoke of a disciplined economy. That phrase has the kind of authoritarian ring the Prime Minister finds so attractive, but which most citizens of this country find so alarming or offensive.

We all know, sir, that it is not what the Minister of Finance believes or wants that is important. He concedes, as he has in committee and in this House, that this is the right time for the economy to begin the decontrol process. But in the end it is not the view of the Minister of Finance which counts, but that of the Prime Minister of Canada. And who knows what the Prime Minister believes? Perhaps he will take the opportunity in the remaining hours of this debate to come in and tell the House about the economy of Canada. He has not spoken in the House of Commons in this calendar year. Perhaps he would like to take this opportunity to come in and set forth for Canadians an indication of the goals he is pursuing and the plans he is following for the development of the Canadian economy. Until he does that we only have the record of things he says outside this House.

All of us can remember his statement made in December, 1975, about the failure of the free market system. Last summer, of course, he was reconverted to the free market system. Now we have the interview in *Le Monde*, quoted the other night by the hon. member for Halifax, in which the Prime Minister said it would be foolish to end controls before an election. My colleague from Halifax called that the teachings of some kind of post-Galbraithian school. It strikes me, sir, as pure Keith Davey, if one can apply that adjective these days.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): He is a Poll-horse.

Mr. Clark: The point is, the Prime Minister was dishonest with the country when he introduced controls. We have no reason to believe he will be any more honest in removing controls. Sir, I missed the debate the other day and I regret that. But I read with interest the contribution made by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras). In his contribution, he claimed that the government had achieved what he called “more than a modest measure of success” in restraining its own expenditures. The truth of the matter is that this administration has been on the biggest spending spree in Canadian history. In its first year of office it spent \$9 billion.